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The Magic Ministry of Mud



POOLS of brown, brackish water where the bitter oak leaves steep in the autumn; pools of clear cold snow water where the first clouds of Spring mirror themselves; and all around them Mud. Mud when the Autumn rains fill the water holes to keep the earth from thirsting through the winter; Mud when the returning sun unlocks the icy doors—doors which give off rusty creakings in the first notes of the purple grackle.

Blessed be Mud!—it is the nursing mother of the year's new life. Indeed, they say that if one follows words far enough toward their source, the word Mud will be found to spring from the same idea as Mother, the generatrix of life.

Of what magic ingredients Mud is made! When first Mother Nature sought to make this fruitful mixture, she had a

recipe that no one but she could follow: First, take one sun and set it shining day on day until the air is brought to the right temperature. Then take one earth and turn slowly before the sun, being careful not to turn it oftener than once a day, until the earth begins to radiate the solar rays. Then take a skyful of clouds, press them gently of their rainy juices and sprinkle the earth liberally; stir till dry.

That is all that is required in this simple recipe for Mud. A Sun, a Planet and a Meteorological system tolerably complete, and any one may easily produce a mud puddle.

A very useful article is Mud. It is the first mortar; the art of building may be said to have grown out of mud. Wasps first turned it into cement; birds used it as foundations and anchorage for their nests; human pioneers daubed it in the crevices of their log huts and plastered their chimneys with it as protection against fire; it was from mud beginnings, indeed, that the great cathedrals began to rear their spires into the sky. Our modern motor roads are built of marl, which is an aristocratic name for mud.

But best of all, Mud is the safe deposit of the year. Nature is a wise old dame, though she put all her eggs in one basket, but that basket is the wide, wide world. And it is a mud basket after all. Spring begins anywhere from September to November, not, as many think, in April or May. For from September through November, Nature gathers the myriad eggs out of which the Spring shall come, and packs them away in mud. Hers was the first and remains till now the only perfect cold storage system, wherein a failure of refrigeration means not loss but gain.

One confesses that one has not gathered the statistics on the subject, but all the seeds of all the things that grow from seed are gathered by the winds of Autumn and given over to the custody of the clinging arms of Mud, which gathers the seeds in motherly, and folds them safely till the sun-up of the Spring, when she dresses them in stalk and foliage, brightens them with blossom and sweetens them with woodsy odors, and sends them forth. The magic ministry of Mud!

Mud is the yielding of Earth's heart to her lord the Sun; he makes her to bloom in the ardor of his fire. Yet like all lords of virile nature, his touch would sere and harden were it not transformed by maidenly clouds into a light that is tenderly bearable, fitting it to be the sire of all the life that lies sleeping in the seeds. Like all the yieldings of modesty, Mud is protective even in surrender.

Give then to Mud its honor. It is a mystic mingling of three spheres, the earth, the sky, and the solar heavens. Beautiful as is the Moon, she has no such mellow substance as Mud. Wonderful as is the Sun, yet for all his lordliness, he is forever forbidden the blessing of Mud. But this favored planet of Earth is the Mud Star. Therefore are the trees tall and billowy with foliage, verdant bouquets on the bosom of the world. Therefore is the grass green, a strongly woven carpet upon the floor of the soil. Therefore is wheat brown, and bread sweet, and roses red and the soil mellow—because basic among natural industries is the production of Mud.

What a cosmic joke it would be on our perceptions if our dislike of stepping in mud were really a subconscious sense of its sacredness to life! For what the seers see, all men dimly know; what the poets sing, all men dimly feel, and at least one seer, a poet, too, has said:

" 'Tis not in the high stars alone,
Nor in the cup of budding flowers,
Nor in the redbreast's mellow tone,
Nor in the bow that smiles in showers,
But in the mud and scum of things
There alway, alway something sings."

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